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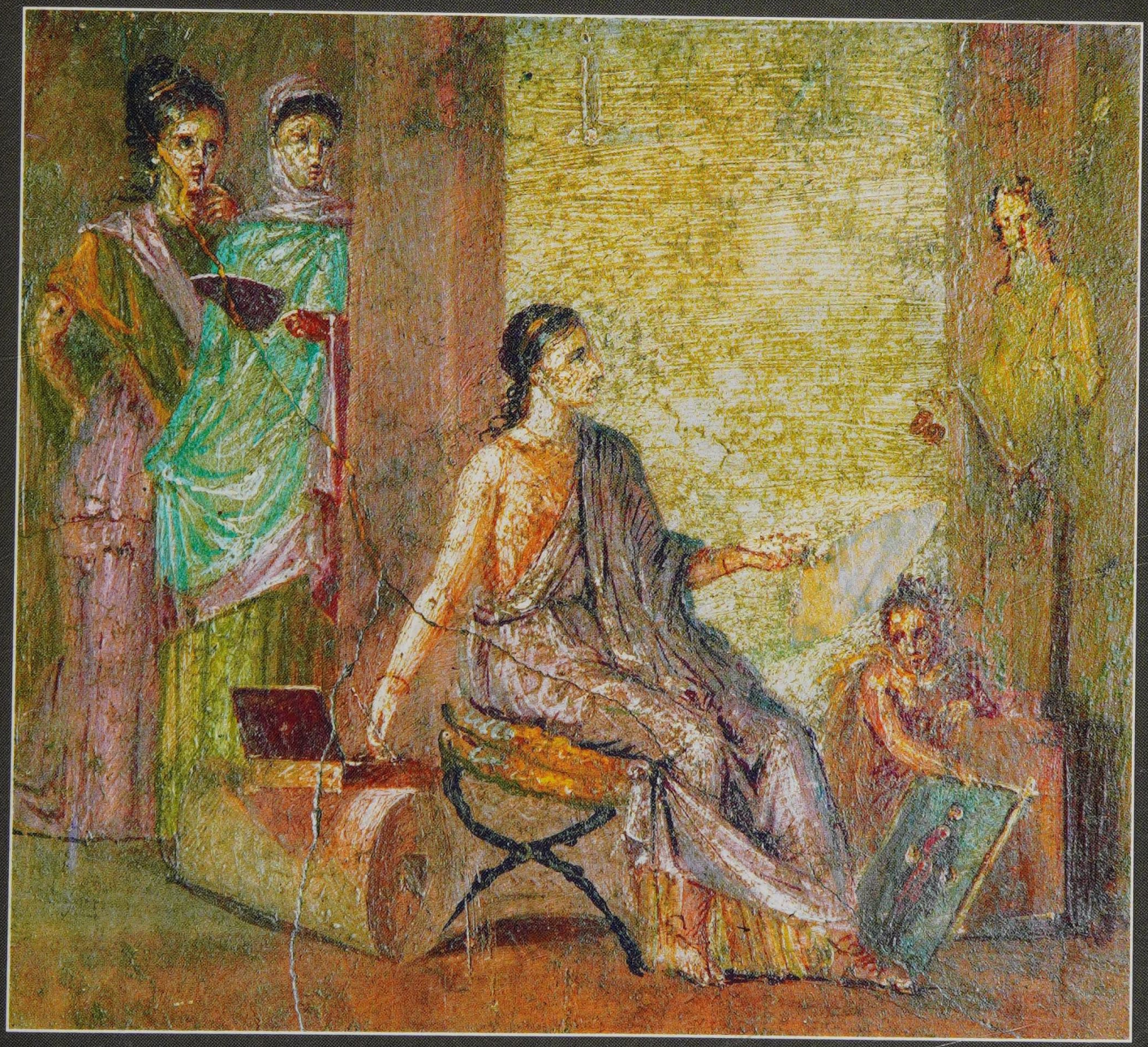
THEMES IN ROMAN SOCIETY AND CULTURE

An Introduction to Ancient Rome



Edited by Matt Gibbs | Milorad Nikolic | Pauline Ripat

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Preface and Acknowledgements

A common desire to provide students of Roman society with readings well suited to the introductory level inspired the conception of this volume. A communal effort by academics from classics departments across Canada and beyond has ensured its realization. We would like to thank all the contributors for their generosity in lending their time and expertise to this project. Their participation demonstrates the true value that they place on student training and the perpetuation of Roman studies. We would also like to thank Peter Chambers, our developmental editor at Oxford University Press, for his excellent advice (of which we availed ourselves often) and insight through this process; his guidance and good humour helped us clear innumerable hurdles that would have otherwise been insurmountable. We extend our special thanks as well to Janna Green, our copy editor; her meticulous reading and helpful suggestions have fostered clarity, consistency, and completeness. Along with our publisher, we are indebted to the following reviewers, who provided invaluable comments and critiques: Daniel Hutter, University of Waterloo; Adam Kemezis, University of Alberta; Philip Kiernan, University of British Columbia, David Meban, Campion College, University of Regina; Lionel J. Sanders, Concordia University; Lisa Trentin, Wilfrid Laurier University; and the three anonymous reviewers. Thanks also go to members of the Classics Students Association at the University of Winnipeg for their willingness to act as a focus group regarding the shape of the volume, thereby helping us to move from quandary to action.

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Contributors

Andreas Bendlin is an associate professor at the University of Toronto, where he teaches classics and Roman history. His research and publications focus on religion at Rome and in the Roman empire, Roman cultural and social history, and the history of scholarship. Recent publications address topics such as Graeco-Roman divination, religious pluralism in the ancient world, and associations in the Roman world. A monograph on religious pluralism in ancient Rome in the late Republic and early Empire is forthcoming.

Michael Carter is an associate professor in the Department of Classics at Brock University. His primary research interest relates to the social and cultural significance of mass public entertainment spectacles, such as gladiatorial contests and similar (Roman) shows. He is especially interested in the impact that the Greek adoption and adaptation of such thoroughly Roman spectacles had on Greek society and identity, and he has published several articles on the topic in journals such as *Phoenix, Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, and *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*.

Fanny Dolansky is an associate professor in the Department of Classics at Brock University, where she teaches Latin language and literature, Roman history, and Roman religion. Her research focuses mainly on the history of the Roman family, particularly domestic religious rites. She has published articles on the Parentalia (*Phoenix*, 2011) and Matronalia festivals (*Classical World*, 2011); book chapters on the *toga virilis* ceremony (2008) and Saturnalia festival (2011); and has a study on children's dolls forthcoming in *Classical Antiquity*. She is currently completing a sourcebook on the ancient city of Rome for Continuum Press (with Stacie Raucci of Union College) and working on a book manuscript on Roman domestic religion.

Greg Fisher is an associate professor in the Department of History and the Department of Greek and Roman Studies at Carleton University. He is an expert on the Middle East in late antiquity, and his current research focuses on the political and cultural relationships between states and inhabitants of frontier regions across the late antique world. He is the author of *Between Empires: Arabs, Romans and Sasanians in Late Antiquity* (Oxford University Press, 2011) and the novel *The Iranian Conspiracy* (FastPencil, Inc., 2011), as well as the editor of *Arabs and the Empires Before Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

Matt Gibbs is an assistant professor in the Department of Classics at the University of Winnipeg. His current research concerns professional associations, taxation, and the

economy of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, as well as the Roman empire generally. He also has research interests in the political history of the late Roman Republic and early Roman Empire. He has published on professional associations and the economy of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt and the Roman empire.

Alison Jeppesen-Wigelsworth is an instructor and learning designer at Red Deer College and the editor of *Cloelia: The Newsletter of the Women's Classical Caucus*. Her research focuses on the family, with particular emphasis on Roman marriage and the portrayal of Roman women in inscriptions. She has published in *Latomus* and *Arethusa* and is currently completing a manuscript exploring the changing depiction of Roman wives in funerary epitaphs.

Benjamin Kelly is an associate professor in the Department of History at York University. His research interests include crime, policing, and the courts in the Roman world. He is the author of *Petitions, Litigation, and Social Control in Roman Egypt* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

Beth Munro is a lecturer at the University of Edinburgh. Until recently, she was a postdoctoral fellow in Roman archaeology at the University of Manitoba. She has also lectured in Roman art and architecture at the University of Winnipeg and tutored at The Queen's College and Hertford College at the University of Oxford and at Roehampton University. She is the finds supervisor on the Dorchester-on-Thames archaeological project. Her research interests include the architecture and decoration of villas and the recycling of stone, glass, and metals in the imperial and late antique periods. She has published numerous articles on recycling at villas and on the relationship between marble statuary and lime kilns.

Milorad Nikolic is an assistant professor in the Department of Classics at Memorial University. He is trained as both a mechanical engineer and a classicist. His research interests are ancient technology and engineering (more precisely, water supply systems), ancient technical literature, Greek and Roman art and architecture, and the northern Roman frontier. He has published on Greek and Roman technical vocabulary.

Kelly Olson is an associate professor in the Department of Classical Studies at Western University. Her research focuses on Roman society, sexuality, and appearance. She is the author of several articles and book chapters on female clothing in Roman antiquity, published in *Mouseion*, *The American Journal of Ancient History*, *Fashion Theory*, and *Classical World*. Her book *Dress and the Roman Woman: Self-Presentation and Society* was published by Routledge in 2008. She is presently working on a monograph entitled *Men, Appearance, and Sexuality in Roman Antiquity*.

Pauline Ripat is an associate professor in the Department of Classics at the University of Winnipeg. Her research interests include Roman magic and divination, particularly as they pertain to social relations and communication. She is the author of several book chapters and journal articles published in *Greece and Rome*, *Phoenix*, and *Classical Philology*.

Luke Roman is an associate professor of classics at Memorial University. His research interests include Roman poetry of the late Republic and early Empire, representations of writing and the material book, the relation between Roman literature and concepts of monumentality, and Renaissance Latin poetry. He has published articles on the epigrammatist Martial and other Latin poets and is completing a book on the rhetoric of poetic autonomy in ancient Rome.

Andrew Sherwood is an associate professor of classics at the University of Guelph. His research interests have led to land and underwater archaeological fieldwork in Italy, Greece, Turkey, Israel, Jordan, and Romania. His publications encompass studies of Latin and Greek epigraphy, Greek and Roman technology, and the excavations of Caesarea Martima, Israel, and Humayma, Jordan.

Leslie Shumka is an assistant professor of classics at Mount Allison University. Her research interests include gender and status in Roman antiquity, women in the Roman economy, and funerary archaeology.

John Vanderspoel is a professor of Roman history in the Department of Greek and Roman Studies at the University of Calgary, where he has taught since 1985. Although he focuses on the later Roman Empire, he has researched and written extensively on many aspects and periods of the Roman world. He has published *Themistius and the Imperial Court* (University of Michigan Press, 1995) and was a co-editor of *The Cambridge Dictionary of Classical Civilization* (Cambridge University Press, 2008). He has written numerous articles that have appeared in a variety of academic journals and is a founding editor of *The Ancient History Bulletin*, for which he currently serves as online editor.

Conor Whately is an assistant professor in the Department of Classics at the University of Winnipeg. His current research interests include ancient historiography and empire (particularly frontiers, imperialism, and warfare) in the Roman world. He has contributed several entries to the *Encyclopedia of Ancient History* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), the *Encyclopedia of the Roman Army* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), and the Late Antique Archaeology volume *War in Late Antiquity*. He is currently working on two monographs: a cultural and historiographical study of military narratives in Procopius's *Wars* and an examination of the Roman armed forces in Moesia from 27 BCE to 337 CE.

A Note to the Reader

The translations of ancient sources in this volume use the following common epigraphic, papyrological, and textual conventions:

- Parentheses ( ) enclose clarifications, supplements, or comments made by the modern author or editor or expansions of abbreviations that appear in the original text. They may also indicate parenthetical statements made by the original author.
- Brackets [ ] enclose damaged or mutilated text; they may also enclose words that have been restored with certainty.
- An ellipsis in brackets [. . .] indicates missing letters or words where restoration is impossible.
- Angled brackets < > enclose words omitted by the original author or scribe but added by the modern editor or translator.
- Ellipses . . . indicate that part of the ancient source has been omitted by the modern author.

The reader should note that brackets are used in quotations of modern scholarship to indicate that a clarification has been made by someone other than the original author.

References to ancient sources generally follow the abbreviations used in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*[1] and the *Checklist of Editions of Greek Latin, Demotic and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets*, which are explained in the following list.[2] Various print and electronic translations of these and other ancient works are widely available. In the event that only one work of a given author is extant, it is the convention to refer to that work by the author's name (or abbreviation of the author's name) only.

AE	*L'Année épigraphique*
Amm. Marc.	Ammianus Marcellinus
App.	Appian
B Civ.	*Bella civilia*
Mac.	*Μακεδονική*
Pun.	*Λιβυκή*
Apul.	Apuleius
Flor.	*Florida*
Met.	*Metamorphoses*
Archil.	Archilochus

Aristid.	Aelius Aristides
Or.	*Orationes*
Arr.	Arrian
Epict. diss.	*Epicteti dissertationes*
Artem.	Artemidorus Daldianus
Asc.	Asconius
Mil.	*Pro Milone*
Auct. ad Her.	*Auctor ad Herennium*
BGU	*Berliner Griechische Urkunden*
BJ	*Bonner Jahrbücher*
BL	Preisigke, F., et al. 1922–. *Berichtigungsliste der griechischen Papyrusurkunden aus Ägypten*. Berlin-Leipzig.
Caes.	Caesar
BGall.	*Bellum Gallicum*
Cass. Dio	Cassius Dio
Catull.	Catullus
CFA	Scheid, J. 1998. *Commentarii Fratrum Arvalium qui supersunt: Les copies épigraphiques des protocols annuels de la confrérie arvale (21 av.–304 ap. J.-C.)*. Collection Roma antica 4. Rome.
Chrest.Mitt.	*Grundzüge und Chrestomathie der Papyruskunde*, II Bd. *Juristischer Teil*, II Hälfte *Chrestomathie*.
Cic.	Cicero
Amic.	*De amicitia*
Att.	*Epistulae ad Atticum*
Brut.	*Brutus* or *De Claris Oratoribus*
Cael.	*Pro Caelio*
De or.	*De oratore*
Div.	*De divinatione*
Dom.	*De domo sua*
Fam.	*Epistulae ad familiares*
Fin.	*De finibus*
Flac.	*Pro Flacco*
Har. Resp.	*De haruspicum responso*
Leg.	*De legibus*
Leg. Man.	*Pro lege Manilia* or *De imperio Cn.*

Mil.	*Pro Milone*
Nat. D.	*De natura deorum*
Off.	*De officiis*
Orat.	*Orator ad M. Brutum*
Phil.	*Orationes Philippicae*
Q Fr.	*Epistulae ad Quintum fratrem*
Rep.	*De republica*
Rosc. Am.	*Pro Sexto Roscio Amerino*
Sen.	*De senectute*
Sest.	*Pro Sestio*
Tusc.	*Tusculanae disputationes*
Vat.	*In Vatinium*
Verr.	*In Verrem*
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*
CISem.	*Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*
Cod.	Codex
Cod. Theod.	*Codex Theodosianus*
Columella	
Rust.	*De re rustica*
Dig.	*Digesta*
Dio Chrys.	Dio Chrysostomus
Or.	*Orationes*
Dion. Hal.	Dionysius of Halicarnassus
Ant. Rom.	*Antiquitates Romanae*
Comp.	*De compositione verborum*
Euseb.	Eusebius
Hist. eccl.	*Historia ecclesiastica*
Eutr.	Eutropius
Festus	
Gloss. Lat.	*Glossaria Latina*
Frontin.	Frontinus
Aq.	*De aquae ductu urbis Romae*
Str.	*Strategemata*
Gai.	Gaius
Inst.	*Institutiones*

Gell.	Aulus Gellius
NA	*Noctes Atticae*
Hdn.	Herodianus
Heron	
Pneum.	*Pneumatica*
Hor.	Horace
Carm.	*Carmina* or *Odes*
Epist.	*Epistulae*
Sat.	*Satirae* or *Sermones*
HRRel.	Peter, H. 1967. *Historicorum romanorum reliquiae*. Stuttgart, Germany.
IGRom	*Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas pertinentes*
ILS	*Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*
Inscr. Ital.	*Inscriptiones Italiae*
IPOstie-A	Hylander, H. 1952. *Inscriptions du port d'Ostie*. Lund.
ISIS	Helttula A. 2007. *Le iscrizioni sepolcrali latine nell'Isola sacra*. Rome.
Jer.	Jerome
Ep.	*Epistulae*
Joseph	Josephus
BJ	*Bellum Judaicum*
Just.	Justinus
Epit.	*Epitome* (of Trogus)
Juv.	Juvenal
Lactant.	Lactantius
De mort. pers.	*De mortibus persecutorum*
Livy, *Epit.*	*Epitomae*
Per.	*Periochae*
Luc.	Lucan
Lucian	
Alex.	*Alexander*
Nav.	*Navigium*
Somn.	*Somnium*
Lucr.	Lucretius
MAMA	*Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiquae*
Mart.	Martial

Nep.	Nepos
Att.	*Atticus*
Nic. Dam.	Nicolaus Damascenus
OGI	*Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae*
Oros.	Orosius
Ov.	Ovid
Am.	*Amores*
Ars am.	*Ars amatoria*
Fast.	*Fasti*
Met.	*Metamorphoses*
Tr.	*Tristia*
P.Amh.	*Amherst Papyri*
P.Athen.	*Papyri Societatis Archaeologicae Atheniensis*
Paus.	Pausanias
P.Bour.	*Les Papyrus Bouriant*
P.Brem.	*Die Bremer Papyri*
P.Colon.	*Kölner Papyri*
Pers.	Persius
Petron.	Petronius
Sat.	*Satyrica*
P.Euphrates	Documents d'archives romains inédits du Moyen Euphrates
P.Fay.	*Fayum Towns and their Papyri*
P.Gen.	*Les Papyrus de Genève*
P.Graux.	*Papyrus Graux*
Philo	Philo Judaeus
Leg.	*Legatio ad Gaium*
Plaut.	Plautus
Rud.	*Rudens*
Plin.	Pliny the Elder
HN	*Naturalis historia*
Plin.	Pliny the Younger
Ep.	*Epistulae*
Pan.	*Panegyricus*
P.Lond.	*Greek Papyri in the British Museum*
Plut.	Plutarch

Caes.	*Caesar*
Cat. Mai.	*Cato Maior*
Cat. Min.	*Cato Minor*
Cic.	*Cicero*
Crass.	*Crassus*
Flam.	*Flamininus*
Mar.	*Marius*
Mor.	*Moralia*
Pomp.	*Pompeius*
Pyrrh.	*Pyrrhus*
Rom.	*Romulus*
P.Mich.	*Michigan Papyri*
P.Mon. Epiph.	*The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes*
Polyb.	Polybius
P.Oxy.	*The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*
P.Petaus	*Das Archiv des Petaus*
Prop.	Propertius
P.Ryl.	*Catalogue of the Greek Papyri in the John Rylands Library, Manchester*
PSI	*Papiri Greci e Latini, Pubblicazioni della Società italiana per la ricerca dei papiri greci e latini in Egitto*
P.Tebt.	*The Tebtunis Papyri*
P.Thmouis	*Le Papyrus Thmouis 1, colonnes 68—160*
P.Turner	*Papyri Greek and Egyptian Edited by Various Hands in Honour of Eric Gardner Turner on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*
P.Vind.Bosw.	*Einige Wiener Papyri*
Quint.	Quintilian
Inst.	*Institutio oratoria*
RG	*Monumentum Ancyranum*
RMD	Roxan, M., and P. Holder, eds. *Roman Military Diplomas*. 5 vols.
Sall.	Sallust
Cat.	*Bellum Catilinae* or *De Catilinae coniuratione*
SB	*Sammelbuch griechischen Urkunden aus Ägypten*
SEG	*Supplementum epigraphicum Graecum*

Sel.Pap. II	Hunt, A.S., and C.C. Cary, trans. 1934. *Select Papyri Volume II: Public Documents*. The Loeb Classical Library 282. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Sen.	Seneca the Younger
Brev. Vit.	*De brevitate vitae*
Clem.	*De clementia*
Constant.	*De constantia sapientis*
Ep.	*Epistulae*
Helv.	*Ad Helviam*
QNat.	*Quaestiones naturales*
SHA	Scriptores Historiae Augustae
Gall.	*Gallienus*
Hadr.	*Hadrian*
Marc.	*Marcus*
Sev.	*Severus*
Tyr. Trig.	*Tyranni Triginta*
Sor.	Soranus
Gyn.	*Gynaeceia*
Stud.Pal.	*Studien zur Palaeographie und Papyruskunde*
Suet.	Suetonius
Aug.	*Divus Augustus*
Calig.	*Caligula*
Claud.	*Divus Claudius*
Dom.	*Domitianus*
Galb.	*Galba*
Gram.	*De grammaticis*
Iul.	*Divus Iulius*
Ner.	*Nero*
Tib.	*Tiberius*
Tit.	*Divus Titus*
Vesp.	*Divus Vespasianus*
Tac.	Tacitus
Agr.	*Agricola*

Ann.	*Annales*
Dial.	*Dialogus de oratoribus*
Hist.	*Historiae*
Tert.	Tertullian
Apol.	*Apologeticus*
Thuc.	Thucydides
Tib.	Tibullus
T.Vindol.	*Vindolanda: the Latin Writing Tablets*
Val. Max.	Valerius Maximus
Varro	
Ling.	*De lingua Latina*
Rust.	*De re rustica*
Vegetius	
Mil.	*De re militari*
Vitr.	Vitruvius
De arch.	*De architectura*
Xen.	Xenophon
Oec.	*Oeconomicus*

Notes

1 Hornblower, Spawforth, and Eidinow (2012).
2 Oates et al. (2011). This list, which provides full bibliographic and other useful information for papyri, ostraca, and related materials (such as the Vindolanda Tablets), is available online at http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/scriptorium/papyrus/texts/clist.html.

Introduction

This volume aims to introduce students to fundamental aspects of Roman society—its composition, institutions, structures, and cultural products—particularly in the period 200 BCE to 200 CE. While there are several excellent introductions to Roman history (some of which include a discussion of cultural issues), this book differs from them by approaching Roman society thematically rather than chronologically. In other words, we do not ask how Rome expanded from a city to an empire but what Roman society looked like. How was it organized, and what practices, ideas, and social institutions supported these structures? The chapters of this volume, each of which has been written by an active researcher and instructor in the field, address these questions with reference to specific elements of Roman society. Our objective is to provide a sense of the relevant evidence and an assessment of the current state of scholarship, thereby forming a basis for further study of Roman life or history.

Content of This Book

By taking a thematic approach, we have given priority to seminal concepts with the broadest relevance in the chosen time period. This method means that chapters do not have to be read in order; however, thought has been put into their arrangement. Chapter 1 offers a sketch of the development of social historical research in the discipline, while Chapter 2's brief history of Roman political life supplies a broad chronological framework for the subsequent chapters' discussion. Chapters 3 to 5 introduce the human elements of Roman society (class and status, slavery, and the household) and their relationships to each other. Chapters 6 to 8 examine the intellectual life that reflected and perpetuated Roman social values (education and literature) and the social construction of self and others (gender and sexuality). Chapter 9 not only considers religion but also acts as a bridge between the previous chapters' focus on the human components of society and the next three chapters' discussion regarding the social structures and institutions (government, law and order, and entertainment) that governed them, supported social cohesion, and provided an opportunity for the expression of collective values. Rome's relations with others is the subject of chapters 13 and 14; Chapter 15 looks at economic dynamics. The final two chapters focus on the physical products of Roman society, technology and

engineering and art and architecture, respectively. Although not given individual chapters, topics such as philosophy, the environment, and Christianity are included where relevant.

The emphasis on themes also creates some overlap between chapters. A critical aspect of the study of Roman society is that social structures, institutions, and relationships did not exist in isolation. In fact, Roman society is best comprehended as the connections between topics, which often elucidate or provide context for others. For example, investigations into the importance of slavery in the Roman world must take into account the household and the economy. Meanwhile, neither of these subjects can be understood without consideration of the presence of slaves. Further associations can be made between the domestic sphere, social roles, and gender and sexuality. The expansion of the empire also involves various overlapping topics, including the military, technological knowledge, taxation, and justice. Marginal notes throughout the text draw attention to such links.

Each chapter of this book includes review questions to help solidify knowledge and develop awareness of the problems surrounding past studies. Annotated suggested reading lists provide sources for further research, as does the text's appendix. The book also features a conclusion, which brings together the themes discussed, and an epilogue, which demonstrates how Roman history continues to influence modern society. Key terms are bolded at their first appearance in each chapter and defined in the glossary.

Another area worth noting is the treatment of the terms *Roman society*, *Republic*, and *Empire*. *Roman society* may seem rather narrowly defined in this volume, given that most of the discussion focuses primarily upon the city of Rome, urban life, men, and citizens (at the expense of provincial communities, rural existence, women, children, non-citizens, and people from other areas). This uneven treatment is both typical of introductory volumes and regrettable. It is typical because more attention must be given to the better documented parts of Roman society in order to study the more elusive elements. It is regrettable because such a lopsided discussion creates a skewed impression of Roman society. The truth of the matter is that the population of the Roman empire was one of astonishing variety, and male citizens living in the city of Rome were only a very small percentage of it. Discussion has been expanded to acknowledge this fact wherever possible.

An important convention of this volume is the use of *Republic* and *Empire* to refer to the chronological span of the political systems (Rome under the leadership of the senate in the Republic; Rome under the leadership of the emperor in the Empire) and *empire* to refer to the geographical expanse over which Rome had extended political control. One may speak, therefore, of the empire under the Republic (the physical territory under Roman rule during the time of the Republic) or of the empire under the Empire (the physical territory under Roman rule when emperors held power). The term *Monarchy* is also used to denote the political system, not the monarch and his or her family.

Categories of Ancient Sources

Research into classical antiquity involves the study of primary sources (ancient evidence in its many forms) and secondary sources (modern scholars' arguments and opinions about aspects of ancient life or history, based on their interpretation of primary sources and the work of their contemporaries).[1] Examples of both types are provided in the appendix. Because familiarity with the ancient evidence is critical to studying antiquity, this section introduces the types of primary sources available for inquiries into ancient Roman society and discusses their advantages and disadvantages.

There are six broad categories of ancient evidence: literary, archaeological, iconographic (or art historical), numismatic, epigraphic, and papyrological. Though countless examples could demonstrate the benefits and limitations of each kind of evidence, it is useful to address both factors in the context of one famous, fixed location: Pompeii and its surroundings. Pompeii, a port city on the Bay of Naples, looms large in the imagination of scholars and tourists alike. Covered in a deep layer of volcanic debris following the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE, it is popularly referred to as a "time capsule" of Roman antiquity and a city "frozen in time." Such descriptions suggest that one need only visit the excavated site to gain a comprehensive understanding of Roman society. But quite apart from the question of how representative of Roman life Pompeii is (Can it be said to be representative of anything but Pompeian life, given the heterogeneous nature of the Roman empire?), careful consideration of the site and the evidence we have from or about it demonstrates that we know much less than we might have thought.

Let us begin with literary evidence, the writings of ancient authors.[2] These authors were almost exclusively wealthy men who were also the intellectual and political elite of their communities. Their writings are categorized as either poetry or prose, but these genres have many subheadings. Poetic works range from long works of epic poetry to brief lines of epigram. Dramatic forms also fall under the heading of poetry because both tragedy and comedy were composed in verse form. Prose works include history, biography, oratory (speeches), letters, and philosophical treatises. Each literary genre was employed for specific purposes and deployed within specific contexts, considerations that must be taken into account when using literary works as evidence.

For example, in a famous letter addressed to the historian Tacitus, Pliny the Younger (*Ep.* 6.16) describes the death of his uncle, Pliny the Elder, during the volcanic explosion that buried Pompeii.[3] Pliny the Younger writes that he and his uncle were residing at Misenum, across the Bay of Naples, when the eruption occurred. The Elder decided to take a closer look (he was in charge of the fleet located at Misenum) and investigate the eruption for scientific purposes, but the Younger chose to stay behind. When word arrived that a friend was trapped in her villa on the Bay of Naples and was begging for his help, the Elder's voyage of discovery immediately changed to a rescue mission. Sailing

conditions, however, did not permit him to reach her villa. Crying "Fortune favours the brave!" he sailed on to the abode of another friend further along the coast at Stabiae, where he and his crew were eventually marooned. Pliny the Younger tells Tacitus (and the readers of his carefully edited collection of letters) that his uncle maintained good humour and even had a bath, dinner, and a good night's sleep before expiring on the beach the next day, where he had gone (using two slaves as crutches) to see if sailing conditions had improved.

Perhaps Pliny the Younger's narrative is true to the events as they occurred. But we would be justified in questioning the absolute truthfulness of the details about his uncle's bravery, in part because the reports he received were second-hand at best and in part because the portrait was being submitted for inclusion in a work of history (or at least in his own corpus of letters edited for publication). He writes to Tacitus, "I realize that his death will be granted undying fame if it is celebrated by you." This realization was surely followed by another: posterity, his uncle's reputation, and his own dutifulness to his uncle's memory all demanded a good, brave death. Perhaps his uncle had co-operated by providing one, Pliny's informants had assisted by shaping their reports to provide one, or Pliny the Younger massaged the reports into something suitable by including some details and neglecting others.

Literary sources also tend to fail to tell the whole story in another way. Pliny's description perhaps justifiably focuses on his uncle's actions to the exclusion of most others'. But his off-hand reference to the slaves who had assisted his uncle to the beach is a sudden reminder that, while Pliny the Elder and his friends were keeping stiff upper lips throughout the eruption, their slaves were preparing their baths, dinner, and beds. We had not imagined them there before because Pliny the Younger had seen no need to mention them. Literary sources generally reflect the priorities of their well-to-do male authors and, consequently, the social value that these same people placed on different elements of society. In other words, those deemed most important receive the most literary attention (wealthy adult males, their thoughts, and their actions receive the lion's share) and those deemed less important receive less. When the latter are mentioned, they are often described in a prejudicial light.

Literary genre and authorial agenda or bias must therefore be considered when interpreting literary evidence. But there is yet another difficulty inherent in the use of literary sources as historical evidence. Most of the ancient literature that we have is thanks to the manuscript tradition, the work of monks copying selected texts. But the copying process often introduced errors into the texts, meaning that we do not have precisely what the ancient authors wrote. For example, Pliny's letter includes the date of Mount Vesuvius's eruption. Different manuscripts, however, state different dates: it might have been 24 August or 23 November. The difference seems extreme in English, but in Latin the dates look and sound much more similar—*nonum kal. Septembres* and *nonum kal. Decembres*,

respectively. The mistake was an easy one for a copyist to make, but it has left us unsure of when the famous eruption actually occurred.[4]

The next category of evidence is archaeological, the physical remains of the ancient Roman world.[5] These are various and include everything from the buildings of the Roman Forum to animal bones in the towns of a far-flung province. Although the practice of archaeology is subject to a number of practical limitations—it is expensive, funding is often scarce, and it is impossible to dig everywhere—archaeological evidence has the potential to tell us much about the lives of larger ancient society because, unlike literary sources, material remains are not exclusively the work of ancient wealthy adult males. This is not to suggest, however, that the lives of all elements of society are equally represented in the physical record. Slaves, for example, were a ubiquitous element of the ancient population but may be as elusive in the physical remains of Roman houses as they are in our literary sources. The design of Roman houses suggests that slaves hid in plain sight. Slave quarters are difficult to identify and perhaps did not exist; slaves might have slept where they could or where they were needed.[6] As this example suggests, the physical evidence is not always straightforward: it is not necessarily obvious what an object or area is or how it is significant.

What is more, the agenda of the one excavating (or funding the excavation) can dictate what is and what is not preserved, and personal expectation of "how things must have been" or other forces can affect interpretation. The site of Pompeii presents an extreme example of excavation undertaken to serve the agendas of those funding the digging, as the area was first treated as a mine of decorative art and sculpture to sate the aesthetic desires of the aristocracy and then to support the political programs of leaders such as Mussolini.[7] In short, all finds were not treated equally. Those deemed less spectacular or less useful were disposed of and, it must be suspected, not even recorded in many cases. Even more recently, political pressure has given way to the influence of popular culture on the selection and interpretation of finds.[8] Estelle Lazer describes the impact of romanticizing fiction (for example, *The Last Days of Pompeii* by Edward Bulwer-Lytton) on the interpretation of human remains at Pompeii and nearby Herculaneum. The popularity of such tales has sometimes inspired scholars to create personas ("the soldier," "the pretty lady," and so on) for some remains by relying on flimsy evidence or, in some cases, by overlooking evidence.[9] Archaeological evidence emerges in response to choices made by the excavators regarding what to look for, and the interpretation of physical remains is as susceptible to the attitudes of the archaeologist as the interpretation of literary sources is to the attitudes of the historian.

The physical record also includes iconographic evidence (for example, wall paintings, sculptures, and mosaics). These sorts of cultural artifacts can tell us much about Roman aesthetics, self-presentation, and identity. They also sometimes give us tantalizing images of historical events or social or religious life. For example, a relief panel on

the familial altar (the *lararium*) in the so-called House of Caecilius Iucundus is thought to depict the Pompeian Forum during the earthquake of 62 CE, while daily life in the Forum (when not rocked by earthquakes) is shown in wall paintings from the Estate of Julia Felix.[10] A wall painting from Herculaneum (now in the Naples Museum) shows a ceremony in honour of the Egyptian goddess Isis (a deity popular in Italy since the second century BCE), complete with priests sporting requisite Egyptian robes and bald heads. This scene exemplifies some of the difficulties involved in the interpretation of iconographical evidence. Is this a depiction of "real" Isis worship? If so, is it a depiction of how Isis worship was undertaken in Egypt or only in southern Italy in the first century CE? This question is justified by the observation that "Egyptomania" took hold in Italy following Egypt's annexation as a province in 30 BCE, with the result that idyllic scenes of Egypt began to appear as domestic decorative motifs. The Egyptians themselves, however, might be depicted as pygmies who were sometimes even engaging in acts of bestiality. In short, paintings of Egypt were often (or always?) of the "Egypt" of Roman imagination rather than the Egypt of reality.[11] Can we therefore trust depictions of other vignettes to act as "photographs" and, if so, of what time and place?

The problem becomes more immediate when we consider how artistic evidence has been used to describe aspects of ancient life that carry moral baggage in our society, such as sex and prostitution. Roman "orgies" have long been a staple of popular depictions of Roman behaviour. It does appear that the Romans (who did not live in the long shadow cast by the prudishness of the Victorian period) did not place the same taboo on sex as a subject for artistic representation that we do: images of sexual acts and sexual organs appear frequently in both public and private locations in Pompeii. However, the ubiquity of body parts (entwined and otherwise) drawn on Pompeian walls has previously led many scholars to conclude that the city housed dozens of brothels: where sex was represented, sex must have been sold. But this logic also leads to the unlikely theory that a small interior room of the opulent House of the Vettii, which featured a painting of a couple having sex, must have been a brothel. Artistic evidence might indicate that the Romans had different attitudes towards sex than we do, but it alone cannot point to locations of the sex trade.[12]

Numismatics (coins or objects that could be used as such) is yet another form of material evidence.[13] Coins often present the opportunity to address quite specific questions or to illuminate specific issues. For example, coins could be (and still are) minted with symbols that were ideologically significant to the community or its ruling authorities. Coin hoards, the savings of individuals who hid them and never returned to collect them, can perhaps say something about the liquidity of individual wealth and the justified anxiety of individuals in uncertain times. Even so, the discovery of coins on dead Pompeians should surely not be taken as an indication of the kind of cash that individuals would normally carry around but rather as all the cash that they had on hand and with which to escape.[14]

Attention to the find spot of coins often yields valuable information for the interpretation of other kinds of evidence. A coin's mint date will provide a *terminus post quem* ("date after which") the layer in which it is found must exist. Indeed, the discovery of a coin that probably dates to September 79 CE in the ash of Pompeii means that Mount Vesuvius could not have erupted in August of that year, thereby possibly answering the question of the season, if not the precise date, of the event.[15]

Epigraphic evidence (words or symbols carved, scratched, written, or painted on stone, wood, plaster, pottery, or metal) is plentiful (and, unlike the body of literary sources, enjoys constant new finds) and can present unique information.[16] Consider, for example, the vast number of so-called *programmata*, statements of support for local political candidates, that were painted on Pompeii's walls or the graffiti that conveyed rather more personal content (for example, "Chios, I hope your piles again become sore, so that they smart more than they smarted before").[17] Although epigraphic evidence presents as straightforward—if it is literally "written in stone," how could interpretation be in question?—complications nonetheless exist. Formulaic expressions find their way into commemorations, making any attempt to discern the "true feelings" of the commemorator difficult. Most inscriptional evidence dates to the second century CE (a phenomenon referred to as the "epigraphic habit"), while other time frames are not as well represented. Reading epigraphic remains is also challenging: stone is hard to carve, and so abbreviations are common. Because inscriptions are rarely found intact, informed guesses must be made about what letters or words are missing.

Even when the basic meaning of an inscription is known, its actual significance often is not. Consider the inscription with which the amphitheatre at Pompeii was dedicated in the years immediately following the city's conversion into a Roman colony: "Gaius Quinctius Valgus and Marcus Porcius, for the honour of the colony, saw to the construction of amphitheatre at their own expense and gave the area to the colonists in perpetuity."[18] But who are the colonists? Are they exclusively the general Sulla's veterans, who had been grafted onto the existing community as colonists? Or are they everyone who lived in Pompeii, including the original inhabitants? Is this dedication an example of an inclusive or exclusive act on the part of the Roman newcomers? The inscription could be understood either way.

The physical context of an inscription is also both critical and potentially problematic for understanding the inscription's significance and for appreciating the insight it can lend to the interpretation of other evidence. For example, a series of *programmata* proclaiming support for one Gaius Julius Polybius in proximity to a house has been interpreted to mean that the house belonged to Polybius (and the human remains found inside to him and to his family); however, exterior street-facing house walls appear to have been public domain as far as graffiti artists and political slogan painters were concerned. Thus, there is no reason to attach home ownership to a name painted on a wall.[19] Similarly, the

presence of graffiti conveying statements of sexual conquests on the walls of bars or inns was once interpreted to mean that all bars and inns doubled as brothels. But on this logic, public toilets in our own society could be identified as brothels by future scholars.[20] The location of inscriptions is an important consideration for both what they can and cannot tell us about ancient society.

Finally, we come to papyrological evidence, which comprises writings on papyrus, an ancient form of paper. However, other substances, such as potsherds (ostraca), are sometimes gathered under the same heading when they have been used as paper would be.[21] Papyrus is a form of evidence almost entirely exclusive to Egypt,[22] where dry conditions encouraged the survival of otherwise friable material. A notable exception is the collection of papyri from the library in the so-called Villa of the Papyri (at Herculaneum, close to Pompeii), which has survived because it was carbonized by the eruption of Vesuvius.[23] Some of these charred rolls have been unfurled painstakingly (and at great expense) to reveal the philosophical works of Philodemus, apparently a favourite of the villa's owner.

The variety of information contained by the papyrological evidence from Egypt, in particular, is immense: copies of works of literature, personal letters, petitions to the authorities, legal documents, inventory lists, census documents, and astrological charts are but a few examples of what the desert sands have yielded. Difficulties nonetheless present themselves here too. Bad handwriting competes with wormholes and other deteriorating factors as issues that impede easy comprehension of the papyrological material. The fact that much of what we have, including prized fragments of lost literature, has come from ancient garbage heaps might make us wonder about their perceived value in antiquity, as does the repurposing of inscribed papyrus as material for making mummy masks (which must be destroyed for the paper to be read). Furthermore, papyrological finds do not uniformly represent all areas or centuries of Greek and Roman Egypt. There is also the question of how much the information gleaned from papyri represents areas outside of Egypt. This is not because Egypt was an aberration among the Roman provinces but because each Roman province was to some extent unique.

In sum, very little of what once existed in the Roman world survives for us to use as evidence for historical investigations and very little of what survives is without obstacles. Attention must always be paid not only to the content but also to the context of any piece of evidence. The more types of evidence that can be gathered to consider any issue or question, the better. In an ideal world, we would never impose our own expectations of "how it must have been" upon our interpretations or propose conclusions that exceed the evidence upon which they are based. These goals are worthy but very difficult to meet; often the best that any student of Roman society can do is to pursue informed and tempered conclusions rather than the holy grail of incontrovertible pronouncements. Although little can be said with certainty about Roman society, much can be suggested and put forth for academic debate. Indeed, many come to study Roman society out of a

fascination with the "facts" of ancient life, but it is the pursuit of the unknowns that are often more captivating and rewarding.

Notes

1 Technically, the term *primary source* should refer to a source that is contemporary with the events or situations for which it provides evidence. Based on this definition, not all evidence from antiquity would qualify as primary in every situation, since many authors describe events that occurred before their time. However, it is common practice to refer to all ancient sources as primary sources and to use the term *secondary sources* to refer to modern discussions of ancient evidence.
2 For the use of literary evidence in the writing of Roman history, see Potter (1999).
3 Quotes from this letter are taken from Cooley and Cooley (2004: 32–4 [C9]).
4 Lazer (2009: 79–80) discusses this and new numismatic evidence that might conclusively date the eruption to the fall rather than the summer.
5 See Biers (1992).
6 George (2007: 539).
7 See Cooley (2003: 65–96).
8 Pressure from commercial funding bodies also exists. See Lazer (2009: 28–9) for a discussion of *National Geographic* and the interpretation of the skeletal remains from the eruption of Vesuvius.
9 Ibid.: 5–35.
10 See Cooley and Cooley (2004: 30 [C3]) and Beard (2008: Plate 7), respectively.
11 See Versluys (2002).
12 See Beard (2008: 236–7, 331–2).
13 See Howgego (1995) for a more in-depth consideration of numismatic evidence.
14 Beard (2008: 1–4).
15 See Lazer (2009: 80).
16 For a broad introduction to epigraphy and its uses, see Bodel (2001).
17 *CIL* 4.1829, translated in Cooley and Cooley (2004: 78 [D91]).
18 *CIL* 10.852, slightly adapted from Cooley and Cooley (2004: 21 [B10]).
19 See Lazer (2009: 32–5).
20 DeFelice (2007: 481).
21 See Bagnall (1995).
22 Papyri and similar forms of evidence have also been found in other parts of North Africa and the Near East. The wooden tablets from Vindolanda, a Roman fort situated 1.5 kilometres south of Hadrian's Wall, are also noteworthy because they contain a variety of information, from expense accounts to personal letters, relating to members of the Roman garrison (see Bowman 1998 for a general introduction).
23 See Zarmakoupi (2010).